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RECOLLECTIONS OF *KRISTALLNACHT* IN VIENNA, NOVEMBER 10, 1938

Fred Ederer
(originally Manfred Ederer)

I had become 12 years of age just eight days before Hitler, on Sunday, March 13, 1938, triumphantly marched into my native Vienna. Hitler had succeeded, without firing a shot, in effecting the *Anschluss*, the annexation of Austria to the German Reich. The next morning my father, who had been following the anti-Jewish events in Germany since Hitler's assumption of power there in 1933, went to the American consulate in Vienna to register our family for immigration to the United States. We would have to wait ten months for the immigration visas.

Measures taken against Jews in Vienna after the *Anschluss* soon proved the wisdom of my father's prompt action. Although, in the days immediately following the *Anschluss*, not many anti-Jewish activities occurred in our residential area, which was only sparsely inhabited by Jews, we became aware, through the newspapers and oral reports, that in other areas of Vienna, Jews, before smiling onlookers, were made to get on their hands and knees on Vienna's sidewalks to remove with toothbrushes pro-Austrian slogans that had been painted before the *Anschluss*, and that some Jewish men were taken to concentration camps. Before long we found *Jude* painted on windows of some shops owned by Jews, the sign *Juden unerwünscht* (Jews not wanted) in windows of some gentile-owned shops, and that Jews were assigned separate benches in Vienna's parks.

Because the firm that employed my father was being "Aryanized," he, along with other Jewish employees, soon lost his job. As the public schools became segregated, I and other Jewish students at the Kandlgasse Gymnasium in the 7th District were transferred to the Robert Hamerling Gymnasium in the Albertgasse of the 8th District. In the early fall of 1938 our family was evicted from our apartment to make room for a storm trooper who had laid claim to it, the storm trooper having come several times to make his angry demand. We moved to an all-Jewish apartment house in the Rafaelgasse, located in the predominantly Jewish 20th District. I was assigned to an all-Jewish school about a 15-minute street car ride from our home.

On November 7 we learned that Herschel Grynszpan, a 17-year old Jew (who, as we later learned, was distraught over his parents' sudden and brutal deportation from Germany across the border into Poland), had shot and wounded the third secretary of the German Embassy in Paris, Ernst vom Rath. My parents recognized with concern that this could have ill foreboding for Jews in German-occupied territories. On November 9, vom Rath died of his wounds.

In the afternoon of November 10th, without explanation, our teacher dismissed the class early, asking us to go straight home. At the time I attached no significance to the dismissal. None of the students asked why--we were happy to go home early. On the streetcar ride home I noticed fire engines in one of the side streets. I knew there was a synagogue in that street, but as yet I did not connect the fire engines to the synagogue--I was to make that connection as the day's events unfolded.

When I got off the streetcar on Wallensteinstrasse and walked the half-block toward our apartment house, I got the first inkling that this was to be an extraordinary day: the inside of the small synagogue on the ground floor of the apartment house was being destroyed. Men were axing the benches and other furnishings. I walked up a flight of stairs and saw a physician's apartment being destroyed--furniture and chandelier. I was frightened. Continuing up one more flight, I rang the bell to our apartment. My mother ushered me in quickly and motioned me to be quiet. The shades to all windows were drawn. Soon my brother Norbert, who had celebrated his Bar Mitzvah nine months earlier, came home from school. My parents then discussed a strategy for dealing with the Nazis, who, according to my parents, were sure to pay us a call. I don't know how they knew that, but they did. Somehow they sensed it would be in the evening. They also seemed to know that the Nazis would be looking for money and other valuables. My parents mainly expressed concern about the two bank books providing access to the funds we needed for booking passage to the United States. We expected to be able to emigrate in December, when our quota numbers for the American visas were due to come up. I don't know whether my parents that afternoon were also aware that my father was at risk of being taken to a concentration camp; if they were, they didn't mention it to the children.

My parents evolved and executed the following plan. My mother sewed into the back of the boys' pajama tops two bankbooks--one bankbook into each pajama top. My brother and I went to bed early, as my parents hoped that the Nazis would neither disturb the children nor discover the bank books. My mother prepared 30 marks in cash to turn over when they asked for money. My parents stayed up and waited.

They came at 11 o'clock, four of them--two uniformed SS-men (members of the *Schutzstaffeln*, or Protective Formations) and two civilians. I was fully awake, but pretended to be asleep. They asked for money and my mother gave them the 30 marks. They then searched all the rooms, including the room my brother and I were in, and took all the jewelry and silverware they could find, which was essentially all we owned. They did not disturb us children and did not find the bank books. Finally, before they left, I heard them ask my father to put on his coat--he was to go with them. Both my father and mother began to plead, but the men insisted that my father had to go. My mother cried, imploring them, on behalf of the children, not to take my father. The Nazis again asked my father to

put on his coat. My father pleaded that he had never done anything wrong and that an Austrian colleague of his who had been a long-standing member of the Nazi party would vouch for him; my father offered them the man's phone number, urging them to place a call, but the Nazis insisted he had to go. So it went--my parents' repeated pleas interspersed with the Nazis' insistence--for a seemingly long time, although it probably wasn't more than a few minutes. I was trembling, shaking visibly. At long last, the men left--miraculously without my father.

The next day we learned that my father was the only adult male resident of the apartment house who had been spared: all the other men, about 20, had been taken away--to the concentration camp at Dachau, as we learned after some time when their families were notified. By the time we left Vienna for the United States (it wasn't until January 19, 1939), the men had not returned. According to the German press, controlled by Josef Goebbels, the Propaganda Minister, the *Kristallnacht* pogrom was a "spontaneous" demonstration by the German people in response to the murder in Paris. A one-billion mark fine was announced for the Jews of Germany.

Years later I read about *Kristallnacht* in history books, among them William L Shirer's "The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich", Raul Hilberg's "The Destruction of the European Jews", and George E Berkeley's "Vienna and its Jews." *Kristallnacht* (crystal night, or "the night of the broken glass") was the evidently scoffing designation given by Nazi party officials to this pogrom, the worst to date and the first organized by the German government. On the evening of November 9 Goebbels told a group of Nazi party leaders who had gathered in Munich to celebrate the anniversary of the 1923 Beer Hall Putsch, that riots against Jews had started in two German districts and that upon Goebbels' suggestion the Fuehrer (Hitler) had decided that the riots were not to be stopped if they spread spontaneously. The only way the party leaders could interpret Goebbels' statement was that the party was not to appear as the architect of the riots, but was to execute them. In Germany, Austria, and the Sudetenland (the part of Czechoslovakia, inhabited predominantly by German-speakers, that was ceded to Germany in September 1938) an estimated 1,200 Jewish religious sanctuaries were destroyed, 7,000 Jewish businesses vandalized, at least 91 Jews murdered (this a preliminary estimate given on November 11 by Reinhard Heydrich, deputy to SS-chief Heinrich Himmler), and 30,000 shipped to concentration camps. The nearly 200,000 Austrian Jews were left with only one functioning synagogue, the one next to the Vienna headquarters of the Jewish community administration on Seitenstettengasse.

"Murder and arson and pillage were not the only tribulations suffered by innocent German Jews as a result of the murder of Rath in Paris" wrote William L Shirer. "The Jews had to pay for destruction of their own property. Insurance monies due them were confiscated by the State. The one-billion mark fine was assessed, as Hermann Goering (Hitler's deputy) put it, "as punishment for their abominable crimes."

Kristallnacht, or *November Pogrom* as it is now sometimes referred to, is viewed by some as the beginning of the Holocaust, the destruction of the European Jews. According to Raul Hilberg, the process of destruction, although it followed a definite pattern, did not follow a basic plan. The November Pogrom was evidently spontaneously initiated by Goebbels. When Goering, Himmler, and other members of the bureaucracy learned about the event, they were appalled, certainly not for humanitarian reasons, but because of its adverse effects on Germany's international relations and economy. Before *Kristallnacht*, the official German policy toward the Jews was expulsion from the Reich. Progressively more severe policies followed: expropriation, concentration, and annihilation. The policies of expropriation and concentration were agreed to on November 12, two days after *Kristallnacht*, in a meeting attended by Goering, Himmler, and Heydrich, when it was decided not only to impose the billion-mark fine, but also to solve the Jewish question as follows: "eliminate the Jews from the German economy; transfer all Jewish business enterprises and property...to Aryan hands..." The matter of expelling them or confining them to German ghettos where they would be impressed as forced labor was left to further consideration by a committee" (Shirer).

The policy of annihilation, designated by the Nazis as "the final solution," was adopted on January 20, 1942 at a conference convened in Wannsee, a Berlin suburb, by Heydrich, and attended, among others, by Adolf Eichmann, Heydrich's expert on Jewish affairs. Heydrich and Eichmann, the two masterminds of the "final solution," were to pay for their staggering atrocities. Heydrich was assassinated in Prague, Czechoslovakia by two members of the Czech resistance in 1942; in reprisal, the Nazis killed more than 1,600 Czechs, including the entire adult population of the village of Lidice, and 152 Jews in Berlin; and they shipped 3,000 Jews from the concentration camp in Theresienstadt to death camps in the East. Eichmann, after apprehension by Israeli agents in Argentina in 1960, was tried and hanged in Israel.

Kristallnacht was a clear signal to all the world that there were no limits to Nazi atrocities and served ample notice to Jews in Germany that there was no hope other than emigration--if only a safe haven could be found. Unfortunately, the few safe havens that existed were open to only relatively small numbers of Jews.